

## ***Draft 9-04-12***

### **Complete Street Policy**

Report by the Complete Streets Subcommittee

## **BACKGROUND**

In the US over the last 50 years, as the interstate highway system and suburban road networks have been constructed, the movement of motor vehicles has been prioritized with little thought given to other forms of transportation. However, more recently, multi-modal roadway design philosophies have been emerging to better balance the speed and convenience demands of motorists with the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and other users.

One of the first such philosophies that has been broadly accepted is the notion of “Context Sensitive Solutions.” This concept developed as a reaction to the building of highways through cities and towns in a way that moved vehicles quickly and efficiently, but undermined the qualities that made the communities thrive. Widening streets to accommodate traffic often involved tearing down the historic and cultural amenities that contributed to a community’s identity as a place. The wide streets designed for fast moving vehicle traffic degraded the pedestrian environment by producing unpleasant levels of noise and exhaust fumes and inhibited the ability of people to cross the street, destroying the social and economic value of the community’s “street life.”

The Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) philosophy attempts to address these negative impacts. Using a CSS approach, transportation planners work with local community groups to design roadways that are more sensitive to the character and economic values of the community the roadway passes through, preserving and enhancing the social, cultural and natural assets of the surroundings, while at the same time, providing for vehicle mobility and safety.

Separately from the development of the CSS concept, other philosophies arose regarding the provision of pedestrian and bicycle facilities. In 1990, the federal government enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act that required roads, parking and buildings to be designed to accommodate access by the physically disabled.

In the early to mid 1970s, interest in bicycling as a form of transportation began to grow. Oregon was the first state to require pedestrian and bicycle accommodation as part of roadway design. Other states and local jurisdictions followed suit as bicycle use gained momentum in response to rising gasoline prices. Especially since the 1990s, many jurisdictions, including the State of Maryland, have required “the routine accommodation” of bicycle facilities in the design of state roads.

The term “Complete Streets” was suggested by a bicycle advocate in 2003 as a replacement for “routine accommodation.” But the term was quickly embraced by smart

growth advocates as a fundamental principle in creating Livable Communities, and it took on a more comprehensive meaning to include all users of the street, including pedestrians, motorists and transit riders as well as bicyclists. The Livable Communities concept also goes beyond CSS in integrating land use and transportation elements. It



*An Incomplete Street (Source: [www.walkable.org](http://www.walkable.org))*



*A Complete Street (Source: Eurist e.V.'s Photostream, [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com))*

envision compact communities where homes, schools, shopping, employment centers, recreation areas and other destinations are connected by a network of Complete Streets, stressing the active transportation modes, walking and cycling, to support a rich street life. Complete Street design can include sidewalks, bike lanes, special bus lanes, transit shelters, medians, crosswalks and amenities such as landscaping and street furniture that create a more pleasant and comfortable human-scaled environment, as appropriate to the surrounding land uses.

The National Complete Streets Coalition was founded in 2005 by a variety of advocacy and trade organizations, including AARP, the American Planning Association, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the American Heart Association. Its mission is to promote

the adoption of a Complete Streets policy by local jurisdictions, which “ensures that transportation planners and engineers consistently design and operate the entire roadway with all users in mind — including bicyclists, public transportation vehicles and riders, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.”<sup>1</sup>

The movement has grown across the US, and has also spread to Canada and Australia. In the US, over 200 jurisdictions have adopted Complete Street policies, reflecting the desire of many communities “to reframe their future around people instead of cars.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [www.completestreets.org](http://www.completestreets.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.pps.org/blog/are-complete-streets-incomplete/](http://www.pps.org/blog/are-complete-streets-incomplete/)

## Existing Baltimore County Transportation Policies

The development of Baltimore County was no different than that of other American suburban communities. Its past land use and transportation planning practices have created a substantially auto-oriented environment. As with other communities around the country, the county's approach to land use and transportation is evolving.

- In 2006, Baltimore County adopted the Eastern County Pedestrian and Bicycle Access Plan, which provides recommendations for retrofitting the county's roadways for increased bicycle and pedestrian use in the urban areas of Council districts 5, 6 and 7. The plan was the first phase of a county-wide plan. A draft of the second phase for the western urban county has been ~~completed~~ approved by the Baltimore County Planning Board and is awaiting vote by the County Council. The third and final phase of the plan for the rural northern county will be undertaken in the future.
- The county's Master Plan 2020, adopted in October 2010, provides a framework for ensuring the county's future urban communities are sustainable communities—compact, walkable, bikeable and transit-oriented—calling for expansion of pedestrian and bicycle policies.
- The county Public Works Design Manual, revised in August 2010, stresses a Context Sensitive Design approach that considers all transportation modes, and includes updated standards for pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- In February 2011, the Baltimore County Council enacted a bill to create a Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee to work with county agencies in the development of a comprehensive pedestrian and bicycle program. The bill charges the PBAC with developing a Complete Street Policy for the urban areas of the county for consideration by the County Executive and County Council. In addition to a Complete Street policy for county roadway improvements, the bill also requires the policy to address other county capital improvements such as parks and schools, land use planning, and safety and encouragement programs.

## SUGGESTED COMPLETE STREET POLICY FOR THE URBAN AREA OF BALTIMORE COUNTY

### Definitions:

**Complete Streets** are public or private roadways that provide safe and convenient access for users of all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders and motorists, and are conducive to the efficient movement of people.

**Pedestrian facilities** may include sidewalks, off-road sidepaths and shared use paths, accessible curb ramps, crosswalks, high-visibility signals, as well as supportive improvements such as benches and pedestrian-scale street lighting.

**Bicycle facilities** may include bike lanes, cycle paths, sharrows, bicycle boulevards, off-road sidepaths, ~~and~~ shared use paths, benches, lighting, bicycle racks, lockers and appropriate signage. ~~Bicycle route signage is provided by Baltimore County.~~

**Transit stop facilities** may include a pregraded loading/discharge area, free of obstructions adjacent to the sidewalk. In areas with a high amount of use, supportive improvements may be included such as benches, shelters, lighting, bicycle racks and lockers. ~~Bus shelters are provided by the Maryland Transit Administration.~~

### **Purpose:**

- Previous development decisions, land use and transportation planning and road design have had the unintended consequence on the daily quality of life of Baltimore County citizens of encouraging widespread dependence on motor vehicles for even the very shortest of trips. The incorporation of Complete Streets principles into new road and land use development, redevelopment and retrofitting multimodal facilities into existing communities will provide additional transportation options for Baltimore County citizens.
- Complete Streets provide additional benefits as well. They can help to reduce roadway congestion, increase transportation network capacity, improve air quality, improve community health, enhance community aesthetics, augment economic growth, and increase community stability by providing accessible and efficient connections between home, school, work, recreation and retail destinations. These benefits are ~~likely to be~~ more important to the future economic and environmental sustainability of the county than reliance on motor vehicle mobility alone.
- Creating healthy, walkable, bikeable and livable communities helps keep Baltimore County competitive in the global competition for high quality businesses and motivated, creative workers who consider transportation and recreation options an essential part of a healthy community.
- While Complete Streets may be achieved through single projects or incrementally through a series of smaller improvements or maintenance activities over time, a comprehensive county policy that provides for coordination and cooperation among many different agencies will produce results more efficiently and effectively. Creating a safe, multimodal transportation system will require not only infrastructure improvements but also supportive educational, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation programs.

## Policy Elements

The following practices, applicable to the area of Baltimore County within the Urban Rural Demarcation Line, describes an effective Complete Streets policy.

- (1) Complete Street design principles for constructing facilities and environments that support pedestrian, bicycle and transit access are described in the Public Works Design Manual, the Comprehensive Manual of Development Policies, and the adopted master plan and its amendments.
- (2) The following applies to the road corridors and publicly accessible facilities planned, constructed, reconstructed, paved or repaved, striped or restriped, or maintained by Baltimore County government:
  - a. For road and bridge projects undertaken by the Department of Public Works, the department provides access by pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders in addition to motorists following Complete Street principles in planning, design, construction, reconstruction, resurfacing and striping activities, ~~where feasible~~.
  - b. For publicly accessible county government facilities, including, but not limited to, schools, libraries, senior, recreation and community centers, and health clinics, the appropriate agency follows the Complete Street principles in planning, design and construction of new facilities or major reconstruction of existing facilities, ~~where feasible~~.
  - c. Bicycle parking for visitors and employees is provided at all new publicly accessible county government facilities including, but not limited to, schools, recreation centers, libraries, senior centers, community centers, health clinics, and parks with permanent improvements ~~and~~. Bicycle parking for visitors and employees is provided at all existing publicly accessible county government facilities including but not limited to, schools, recreation centers, libraries, senior centers, community centers, health clinics and parks with permanent improvements, where feasible.  
  
(Older county buildings should be surveyed to determine cost factor for Complete Street Compliance. Those facilities should then be prioritized and completed as budget or grants allow.)
  - d. Compliance with Complete Street principles by County government agencies is exempted in certain situations ~~where including the following~~:
    - i. The inclusion of pedestrian, transit and/or bicycle access is prohibited by law.
    - ii. The existing right-of-way area is not adequate to accommodate a pedestrian, bicycle or transit facility and right-of-way widening is not

- included in the project, in which case a greater effort may be necessary to accommodate those users elsewhere the same transportation corridor.
  - iii. Use of a pedestrian, bicycle or transit facility is not anticipated due to lack of current and future need except if the facility is included in the Eastern and Western Pedestrian Bicycle Access Plans, or other adopted plan.
  - iv. The cost of providing a pedestrian, bicycle or transit facility clearly outweighs expected use.
  - ~~v. Funding for a pedestrian, bicycle or transit facility will not be available~~
  - vi. ~~Unacceptable time delays would result~~ Unreasonable delays would occur when performing routine maintenance and other minor operations.
  - ~~vii. For bicycle facilities, the recommendations of the Eastern and Western County Pedestrian and Bicycle Access Plan, or other adopted plan, do not apply, and a bicycle facility on the road corridor cannot be incorporated into the planned bicycle network~~
  - viii. For on-road bicycle facilities, the paved roadway width is less than 30 feet, unless the facility is included in the Eastern and Western Pedestrian Bicycle Access Plans, or other adopted plan.
  - ix. For transit user improvements, a road is not served, or planned to be served, by transit.
  - ~~x. Other reason as approved by the director of the responsible agency.~~
- e. ~~With the exception of repaving and striping operations,~~ When a county construction or reconstruction project does not follow Complete Street principles, the director of the responsible agency notifies the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee (PBAC) of the decision, ~~and~~ provides a written explanation using a checklist developed by the PBAC, and compiles an annual summary (based on the County's fiscal year) of total road miles constructed, reconstructed, repaved, and restriped and the total road miles where Complete Streets pedestrian and bicycle improvements were implemented.

(3) The following applies to development projects:

- a. The Department of Permits, Approvals and Inspections, the Department of Public Works and the Department of Planning reviews development projects for the inclusion of Complete Street principles, ~~as appropriate.~~
- b. The director of the appropriate Baltimore County government agency may determine, after review by the director or his or her designees, that the project is exempted from following the Complete Street principles, including under circumstances where:
  - i. The inclusion of pedestrian, transit and/or bicycle access is prohibited by law.



- ii. For on-road bicycle facilities, the planned paved roadway width is less than 30 feet, unless the facility is included in the Eastern and Western Pedestrian Bicycle Access Plans, or other adopted plan.
    - iii. For transit user facilities, a road is not served, or planned to be served, by transit.
    - ~~iv. Other reason as approved by the director of the reviewing agency~~
  - c. The director of the appropriate Baltimore County government agency may determine, after review by the director or his or her designees, to grant a waiver of pedestrian and/or bicycle facilities including under circumstances where:
    - i. Use of the pedestrian and/or bicycle facility is not anticipated due to lack of need or connectivity.
    - ~~ii. For bicycle facilities, bicycle facilities on an adjoining property are not yet present.~~
    - ~~iii. Other reason as approved by the director of the reviewing agency~~
  - d. When pedestrian and/or bicycle facilities are waived, a dedicated fee-in-lieu payment in the amount of the present cost to construct the waived facility, be paid by the developer and is placed in a distinct revenue account for local open space waiver fees, and the land area for the pedestrian and/or bicycle facility is reserved, pre-graded and free of impediments such as street trees, fences, signs, utility appurtenances, etc., and with appropriate public access rights recorded, for future construction by the county. The project's storm water management facilities are designed to manage the impact of the future paved area.
  - e. When a project receives an exemption from or a waiver of the Complete Street principles, the director of the appropriate agency notifies the PBAC of the decision, and provides written explanation using a checklist developed by the PBAC.
  - f. The Department of Recreation and Parks and the Department of Permits, Approvals and Inspections may allow pedestrian and bicycle facilities to fulfill a portion of active local open space requirements.
- (4) An annual assessment of Complete Streets as provided in Section (2)e shall be used to determine if an adequate level of implementation is occurring to meet the goals of the PBAC and to introduce amendments to the county code, zoning, and development process so that the intent of the legislation is fulfilled.
- (5) The Department of Planning includes a sustainable transportation section in all of its local area plans, addressing appropriate accommodations for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users in addition to motorists, ~~as appropriate.~~

- (6) The Police Department undertakes enforcement and education activities to facilitate safe use of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, ~~county roadways, according to the funding available.~~
- (7) The Health and Human Services Department promotes healthy lifestyles that include walking and bicycling through its programs, ~~according to the funding available.~~
- (8) The Baltimore County Public Schools and the Department of Recreation and Parks assist the Police Department in educational activities related to walking and bicycling laws and safety practices, and the Health and Human Services Department in promoting healthy lifestyles that include walking and bicycling, ~~according to the funding available.~~
- (9) The PBAC encourages the creation of partnerships and coordination of efforts with other governmental and private entities in providing pedestrian, bicycle and transit user facilities and outreach, ~~such as the College of Baltimore County, state and private educational institutions, and business, development and health organizations.~~
- (10) Baltimore County Public Schools, and the Departments of Public Works, Planning, Police, Recreation and Parks, and Health and Human Services, through their representatives on the PBAC, annually report on their activities in creating walking, bicycling and transit user facilities, and on education, encouragement and enforcement programs, to the PBAC for inclusion in the committee's annual report.



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Web References:

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Eurist e.V.'s Photostream ([www.flickr.com/photos/38607288@N03/3836097829](http://www.flickr.com/photos/38607288@N03/3836097829)) (photo of Stockholm Complete Street)

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